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Austria

Biotechnology

Consumer Attitudes on Biotechnology

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Report Highlights:

Austrian consumers are one of the leading opponents to green biotechnology. The majority of Austrians prefer no biotech products in agriculture and food because they believe that genetically modified food carries an incalculable risk for future generations and that the natural order is at risk. Given recent unfortunate European experiences with food disasters, the Austrian consumers have no trust in food safety and biotech legislation.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
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Anti Biotech propaganda strongly influences and shapes Austrian consumer attitudes against Biotechnology in food and agriculture. Consumers' emotional gut reaction sways calmer scientific reasoning.

According to recent surveys Austrians are more skeptical of, and oppose, biotechnology than the average Europeans. A large discrepancy is found between the acceptance of medical and agricultural applications. Red, or medical, biotechnology is highly accepted whereas applications in agriculture are condemned.

Austrian Consumers believe genetically modified food carries an incalculable risk for future generations, they also highly believe, that the natural order of life is at risk. Given the recent European food scares they do not trust food safety and biotech legislation to protect them.

While the organic market is growing in Austria, the consumers generally prefer to purchase non-organic, yet traditionally produced Austrian food and food products.

In agriculture, public opinion regards biotechnology as a hazard for both organic and conventional farming. Austrians, and specially a high percentage of farmers, think that coexistence of genetically modified crops and conventional crops is impossible in Austria due to small scale farm structure. Surveys show that 95 % of conventional Austrian farmers object to genetically modified feed and 53 % of conventional crop farmers believe that they would face marketing difficulties if their seeds contained any biotech organisms even if they were legal.

Following opinion, or making public opinion(?), Austria's major supermarket chains announced that no Biotech food products would be stocked or sold. See also GAIN Report Number: AU4006.

It is expected there will be a large demand for food certified GMO-free. Therefore, Tirol Milch introduced a new brand label for certified GMO free milk "kontrolliert gentechnikfrei erzeugt" in March 2003. To produce this "controlled biotech free produced" milk, 720 dairy farmers in Tirol committed themselves to use only GMO-free feed for their dairy cows.

The Austrian government responding to consumer attitudes takes a hard line on green biotechnology and prevents the introduction of new biotech crops. Most Austrian provinces made some efforts at establishing 'GMO free zones'. The Carinthian Provincial Government introduced a draft biotechnology precautionary bill ("Gentechnik-Vorsorgegesetz") that could become a model for anti-biotech legislation across Europe as the EC has deferred comment upon it thus enabling it to become law. See also GAIN Report Number: AU3016.